

## Spiny Oyster



The oyster is a shellfish. Found in shallow, warm ocean waters, their shells are flat and fan-shaped. Their colors range from bright white to all the colors of the rainbow.

The Aztecs harvested the spiny oyster for their red shells and used them for decoration. They also used whole shells to pay tribute to the emperor.



This special dog breed is often called a Mexican Hairless because it has no fur. It is related to the Chihuahua. This dog has been bred in Mexico for over 3,500 years. The Aztecs raised these dogs for food, and being hairless made the dogs easier to clean and roast. They were named after the Aztec god with dog-like characteristics—Xolotl.



**Xoloitzcuintli**

## Turkey



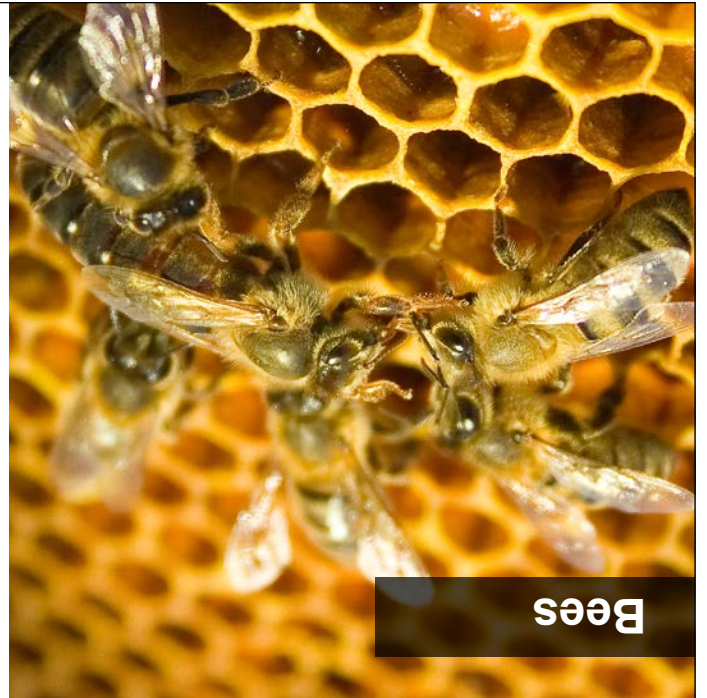
Wild turkeys are native to the Americas. The turkey was one of the first animals to be domesticated by the Aztecs. They used its meat for food and its feathers for decoration. It was not unusual for 1,000 turkeys a day to be bought and sold in large Aztec markets.

Ceremonies to honor the turkey were marked by the people throwing turkey eggs into the streets.



The Aztecs kept large beehives in order to harvest the honey made by the bees. Honey was used to flavor drinks, make sweets, and as medicine.

## Bees





## Duck



The muscovy duck is native to Lake Texcoco, where the Aztec capital was founded. The Aztec domesticated the duck and used its meat for food and its feathers for decoration.



Most of the limestone used by the Aztecs came from the Yucatán Peninsula. Brought to the big cities in large slabs, the limestone was cut and polished, then used to build amazing temples and the palaces of the nobility. Limestone was the favorite stone of Aztec sculptors and artists. Lime powder from ground limestone was used in the making of Aztec bread—*tortillas*.



## Limestone

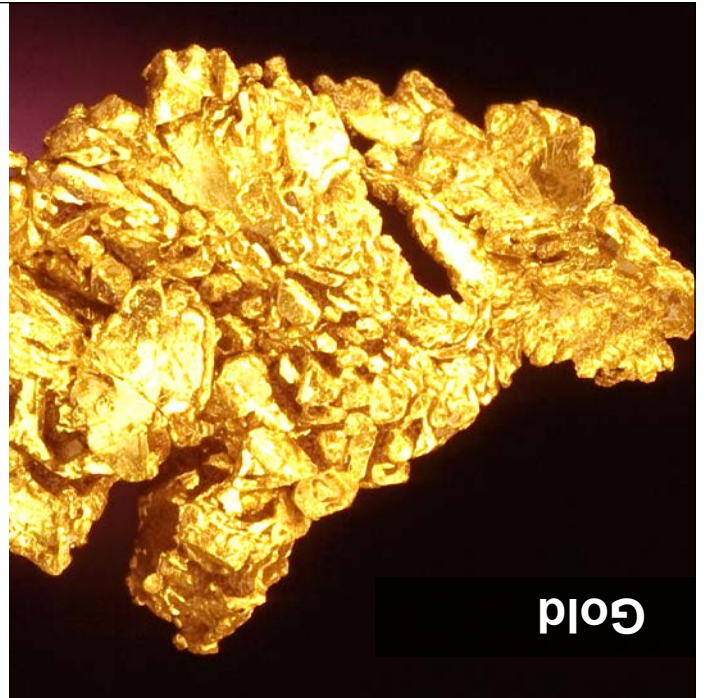
## Obsidian



Surrounded by active volcanoes, the Aztec capital had many obsidian deposits. Large obsidian flakes made very sharp, tough knives, spearheads, and arrowheads. Many ceremonial blades used by Aztec priests were made of pieces of sharpened obsidian, placed in elaborately decorated handles.



There were many gold deposits in and around the Aztec empire. Gold dust was accepted as tribute by the emperor, and gold was made into jewelry and other decorative items, but it was not particularly valuable to the Aztecs. Silver and turquoise were more treasured.



Gold



## Turquoise



One of the most popular stones among the Aztecs was turquoise. The stone was made into beads, and small, thin slices of the stone were inlaid into clay or wood sap to form intricate mosaics.

The Aztecs mined turquoise from many places in the empire, but the finest turquoise came from the lands north of the Valley of Mexico, in present-day New Mexico.



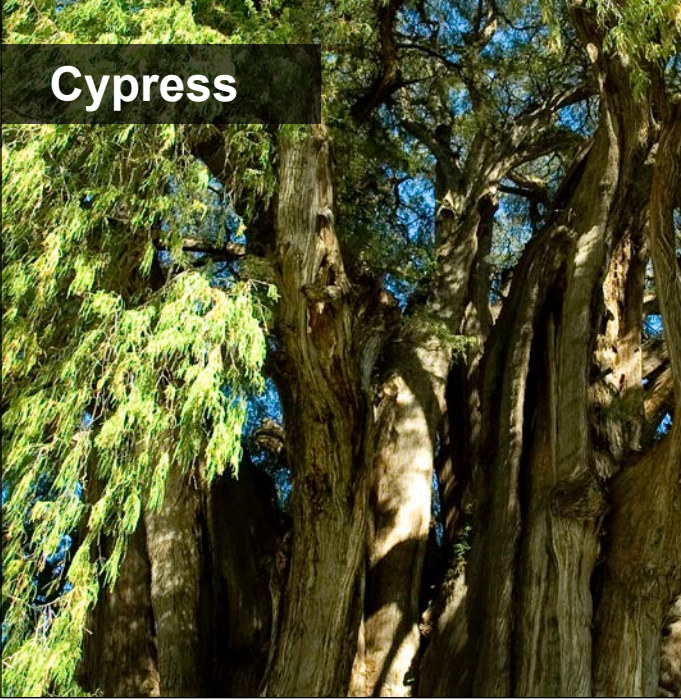
There were a few large mines in the empire where the Aztecs extracted copper. The Aztecs used copper in decoration and in weaponry, but it was also used as a medicine, particularly in the treatment of sore throats.



Copper



## Cypress



The Aztecs believed that their creation was tied to the cypress, a native tree from the highlands around the Valley of Mexico. The wood of the cypress was used to make furniture and in construction. The sap had many uses as medicine.

The Aztecs also used cypress trees to make the *chinampas* (chee-**nahm**-pahs)—floating crop fields—in Lake Texcoco around Tenochtitlán.



The ironwood is one of the oldest plants native to the Sonoran Desert. The seeds and flowers were used by the Aztecs for food and as medicine. Ironwoods also attract many animals, such as birds. The Aztecs knew thickets of ironwood provided good hunting.

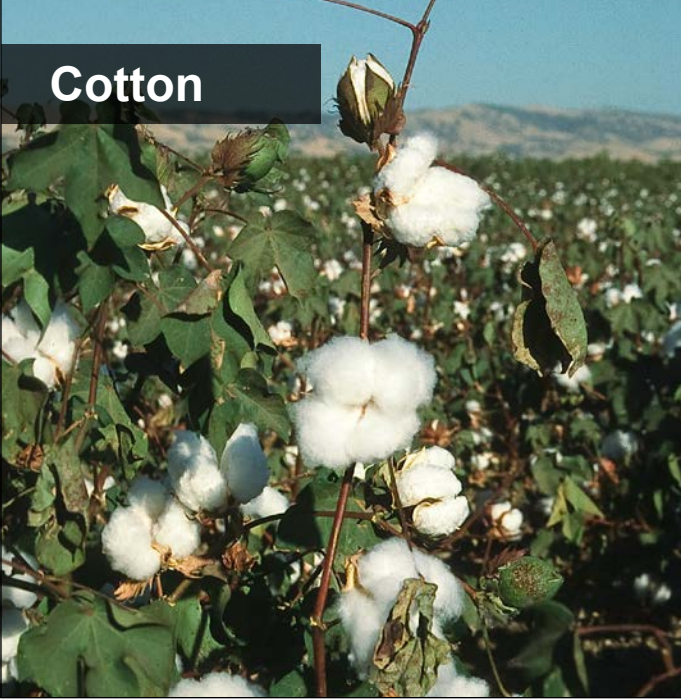
The dense wood of the tree was used to make tools and objects, but also charcoal, which was used as fuel in many Aztec homes.

## Ironwood





## Cotton

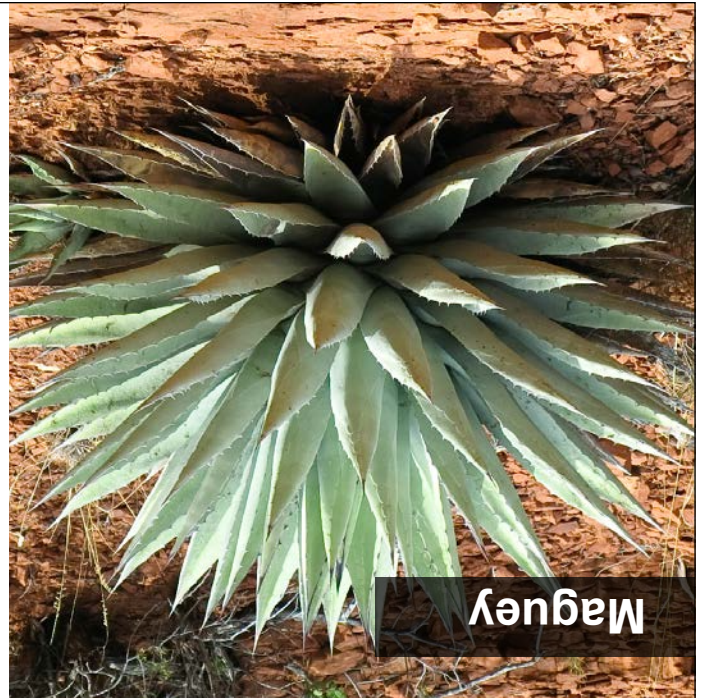


The Aztecs farmed cotton in the warmer areas of the empire. They wove cotton into all types of cloth, for all types of purposes. Special cotton capes, called *quachtli*, were used as money and to pay tribute to the emperor.

Weaving cotton was the job of women in Aztec society. Mothers taught their daughters to weave from a young age.



The magney was cultivated by the Aztecs. It is sometimes called the "century plant" because it blooms only once in a very long while. Fibers from the magney leaves were used to make cloth, paper, and rope. The sap was extracted and used to make drinks, vinegar, and sugar. The thorns were harvested and used as nails and pins.



**Magney**

## Maize



The most popular food in Aztec culture—eaten at almost every meal in some form—was corn, which the Aztecs called *maize*. The Aztecs grew many different kinds of maize, and they made drinks, bread, popcorn, and soup from all of them. Soaking the maize in water with ground lime (from limestone) before cooking made the corn even more nutritious.

The gods and goddesses that directly affected the corn harvest—for example Tlaloc, the rain god—were some of the most important gods in the Aztec religion.



Lake Texcoco is a saltwater (saline) lake. Other lakes in the area, which are higher in elevation, are primarily freshwater. Algae grew in these lakes, which the Aztec people harvested using thin nets. The blue-green algae (known as spirulina algae today) were a popular food, usually dried and made into a drink.

## Blue-green Algae





## Amaranth



The Aztecs grew more amaranth than any other crop. The seeds from the plant were harvested and cooked, often with honey, to make cakes or a sweet stew. Much more nutritious than corn, the Aztecs considered amaranth to be a “super food” that would give warriors extra strength when they went into battle



## Vicuña



The vicuña is native to areas high in the Andes mountains. Its fur is the rarest and most valuable fiber in the world. The Inca believed the vicuña was a sacred animal, and only the Inca nobility could wear clothing made from its fur. If anyone harmed one of these animals, they were punished with death.

Every four years a special event took place, called a *chaccu*, where the Inca carefully rounded up vicuña into special pens, clipped their fur, and released them unharmed.



*Cuyes* (guinea pigs) were raised throughout the Andes as a source of meat. Peasants in the Inca Empire would allow guinea pigs to live and nest in and around their homes, where they would eat grass, leaves, and vegetable scraps. When ready to cook, guinea pigs would be skinned, cleaned, and roasted over an open fire.



Cuy (koo-ee)



## Llama



The llama migrated to South America from the grasslands of North America during the last Ice Age. Unlike the vicuña, the llama was domesticated by the Inca, who raised them for various uses. The Inca used the fur of the llama to make wool thread, which they spun into cloth. They used the meat as food and the llamas as pack animals.



## White-tailed Deer



The white-tailed deer is native to many parts of the Americas. This animal was valuable to the Inca for both its meat and its hide. The population of white deer was carefully counted by Inca rulers, and it was against the law to hunt the deer, except during special times and with direct permission from the emperor.

## Fish



The Inca enjoyed eating many species of fish and shellfish. The people on the Pacific Coast ate fish as part of their regular diet. Fish was also dried and eaten by the soldiers in the Inca army. Bonito and shark from the Pacific Ocean, catfish from Lake Titicaca, as well as limpets and other shellfish, were very popular among the nobility, too.



The meat and feathers of the Inca tern, penguins, and other seabirds were very valuable to the Inca. These birds are native to the islands and coastal areas of the empire and were protected by the emperor.

The Inca did not eat the eggs of the birds. In fact, damaging the eggs or disturbing the birds during nesting season was punishable by death.



## Seabirds



## Granite

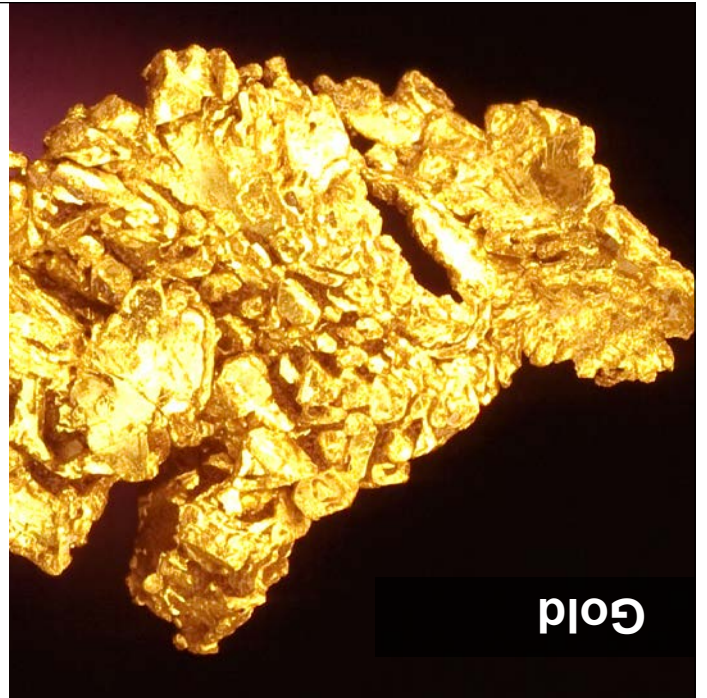


Inca architects built some of the finest buildings in the world, largely out of granite, which is a very hard stone. Blocks of granite were cut by hand and put together without any mortar, like gigantic puzzle pieces. The faces of the stone fit together so tightly that a needle cannot fit between them.

Many Inca buildings are still standing today because of the hardness of the granite and the ingenuity of the Inca builders.



The Inca believed that gold was the “sweat of the Sun.” They valued this metal as a symbol of the Sun god, not as money. Artisans shaped the gold into beautiful ornaments. Architects covered stone walls with it. Sculptors created statues of gold to decorate temples and the royal houses in Cuzco. It was forbidden for anyone to remove gold from the city of Cuzco.



Gold

## Turquoise



Turquoise is one of the oldest gemstones in the world. It is usually found near copper deposits. The Inca used turquoise for decoration, often in artifacts that were used in special ceremonies.



## Salt



The Inca valued salt from the Sacred Valley. Huge stone ponds called "salt pans" were built into the hillsides. Salty spring water from the Andes Mountains was redirected into the ponds, where it would sit until the Sun's energy evaporated the water, leaving the salt behind. The salt was harvested and used by the Inca people throughout the empire as medicine and for drying foods.



## Copper

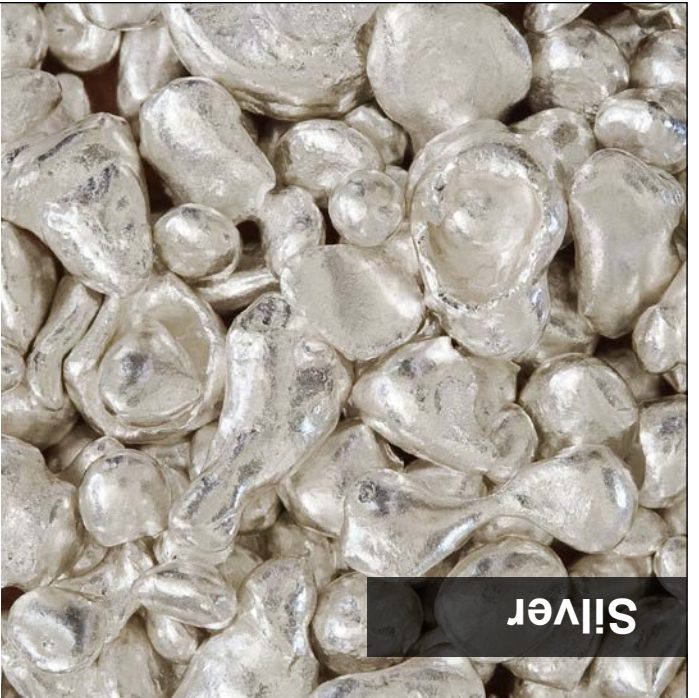


Copper was a more “common” metal, used by the Inca for everyday items like cups, plates, and bowls, as well as for tools like axe heads and spearheads.



Silver was believed by the Inca to be the “tears of the Moon.” As precious as gold, silver was used to make ornaments, figurines, and special ceremonial artifacts for use by royalty or in special events.

## Silver



## Potato



The potato was first cultivated by the Inca, and it is native to South America. Different species of potato grew in all parts of the Inca Empire, from the highest mountain regions to the coastal forests.

The Inca ate many varieties of potato regularly and perfected a way to dry and mash the potato so that it would keep up to 10 years, in case of a food shortage.



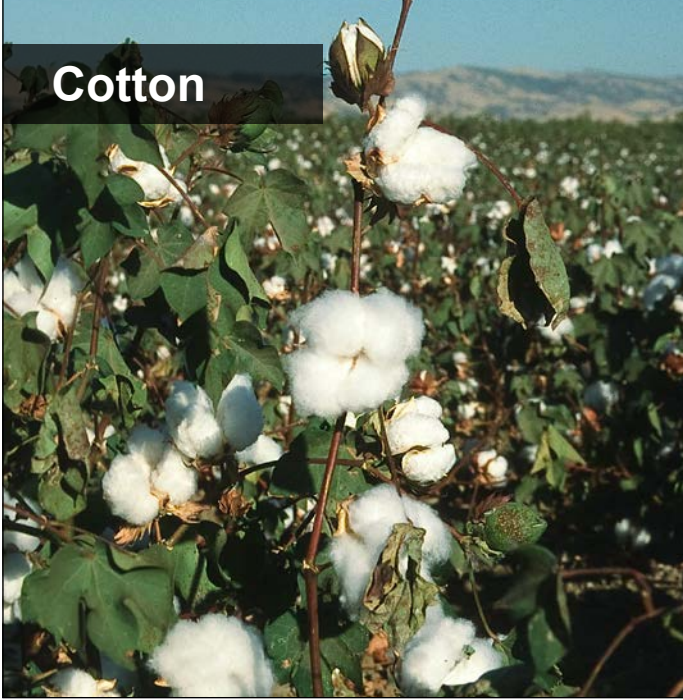
The Inca called the grain of the *quinoa* plant the “mother grain.” It grew wild in the Andes Mountains, but the Inca learned to cultivate it. They believed it had healing properties. Like potatoes and maize, quinoa was eaten regularly. The emperor would be the first to plant a quinoa plant when the planting season began.

## Quinoa (keen-wah)





## Cotton



Archeologists have found cotton cloth made before 3000 BCE (Before the Common Era) in Peru. The variety of cotton native to the area of the Inca Empire is called “pima” cotton today. This type of cotton has long, silky fibers, which gives the cotton thread and cloth a very soft feel. The Inca wove cotton thread into cloth, which they dyed many colors, using dyes made from plants and animals.



The Inca used the wood of the alder tree for fuel and in construction. They planted alder trees on the hillsides of the Sacred Valley to slow erosion and to help fertilize the soil.

As the population grew, the Inca emperor set limits on how many alder trees could be harvested and when, in order to prevent deforestation in the valley and in other parts of the empire.



## Alder

## Maize



The Inca believed that *maize* was a gift from the Sun god. Maize was eaten, like potatoes and quinoa, almost daily, and was made into a very popular drink.

The Inca cultivated maize in terraced fields that they built into the sides of the mountains and hills. Maize was buried with the dead to help “feed” the spirits in the afterlife.



Many varieties of seaweed were harvested and eaten by the Inca. Sometimes the seaweed was dried, but most often it was eaten raw or used in soup.

## Seaweed

